

Four questions relating to creativity and co-production – Evidence & Policy Blog

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Four questions relating to creativity and co-production

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Reflections arising from an Evidence & Policy Special Issue exploring the role and value of Creative Practices in Co-production. This blog post is based on the Editorial to the Special Issue, '[Exploring the value and role of creative practices in research co-production \(https://doi.org/10.1332/174426421X16478821515272\)](https://doi.org/10.1332/174426421X16478821515272)'.

Our *Evidence & Policy* [Special Issue \(https://doi.org/10.1332/174426421X16478821515272\)](https://doi.org/10.1332/174426421X16478821515272), exploring the value and role of creativity and co-production in research, highlights four key questions:

1. What constitutes research? And who decides?
2. What constitutes legitimate knowledge?
3. What constitutes creativity and co-production in research?
4. To what extent are we constrained in the opportunities to undertake 'creative' research?

1. What constitutes 'research' and who decides?

The initial paper filtering process opened debate about what is defined as research, and who decides this. We contrasted reviews of several papers revealing tensions between ‘science’ reviewers, ‘creative’ and ‘lay’ or ‘patient’ reviewers. A focus of this debate is evident in the paper by [Thom et al.](https://doi.org/10.1332/174426421X16432180922551) (<https://doi.org/10.1332/174426421X16432180922551>) and their account of [Kaupapa Māori led co-production](https://heturekiatika.com/) (<https://heturekiatika.com/>), wherein the use of Kaupapa Māori methods are seen to be not routinely referenced or well understood in Western academic literature.

2. What constitutes legitimate ‘knowledge’?

For several papers, including those by [Adelle et al.](https://doi.org/10.1332/174426421X16474528475330) (<https://doi.org/10.1332/174426421X16474528475330>) and [Thom et al.](https://doi.org/10.1332/174426421X16432180922551) (<https://doi.org/10.1332/174426421X16432180922551>), the subject of debate was the peer review process and the extent to which research was situated in the context of existing theory, models, methods and practices. While this discourse is not unusual in a peer review process, acknowledgment exists where there needs to be a sensitivity to the context of research work that used ‘non-standard’ epistemologies such as creative methods or indigenous ways of knowing. We recognize that if the only way of validating knowledge produced is through reference to a pre-existing knowledge base, we risk recolonising knowledge through our peer review processes.

3. What constitutes co-production and creativity in research?

We had debated, as an editorial group and amongst the authors, about what constitutes co-production and creativity in research. Ultimately, we concluded that it may be problematic to have a fixed, or bounded, definition of either and that doing so may be counter to their essence. Rather, we acknowledged them to be inherently plural and contextually dependent. In our editorial we discuss this further, but draw some highlights below.

From a co-production point of view, a small number of papers detail the involvement of service users in the ‘foreword’ stages of their research (e.g., proposal writing and methodological design), or the ‘governance’ levels of their research (e.g., advisory boards, management groups), focusing instead on the practical activities of research that people partner to collect, analyse, develop, etc. One exception to this was [Potts et al.](https://doi.org/10.1332/174426421X16420949265777) (<https://doi.org/10.1332/174426421X16420949265777>), who specified their engagement with co-production partners across multiple levels and activities.

Most authors were explicit about the creative practices used in their research (e.g. [Phillips et al.](https://doi.org/10.1332/174426421X16445103995426) (<https://doi.org/10.1332/174426421X16445103995426>) and [Webber et al.](https://doi.org/10.1332/174426421X16437342906266) (<https://doi.org/10.1332/174426421X16437342906266>)). The inherent nature of creative activities within (for example) a design process were often debated and recommendations presented that researchers should make clear when they have used creative practices – and be explicit as to how and what that means in their specific research. The following two criteria, as fundamental to creative practice in the context of co-production and research, were suggested:

- Creativity should engage the imagination, manifested through a variety of forms of expression; performance, imagery, artifacts or words formed through a creative process.
- Creativity should involve a generative process of making or crafting. Simply watching does not provide the same conditions to enable a person or group of people to reflect, ponder, consider, and weigh-up.

4. To what extent are we constrained in the opportunities to undertake 'creative' research?

The irony of using conventional methods for research reporting to demonstrate the role and nature of co-production and creativity as a mechanism for addressing the evidence-practice-policy gap, is not lost on us. We debated the limits of peer-reviewed publications for this purpose. We attempted to 'walk the walk' by engaging our authors in co-producing the special issue alongside us. Some of our authors also attempted to take their readers beyond the page and invite engagement in their findings in other ways. For example [Beckett et al.'s](https://doi.org/10.1332/174426421X16420902769508) (<https://doi.org/10.1332/174426421X16420902769508>), use of sound cloud links which, in the author's own words, emphasises "...storytelling and social means of communication...".

Parting thoughts

Diversity of genres, culture, ideas and knowledge makes humans and our societies stronger and richer in multiple ways. Co-production and creativity in the service of research are essential tools to engage with human diversity and with a complex range of societal challenges. There remains another underlying challenge in how co-production and creative practices can be carried out within academic research domains where there is still a tendency to give preference to the 'traditional' academic voice and forms of research.

We suggest that co-production and creative practices enable a blending of perspectives in a way that puts research equally alongside other ways of valuing research practices and processes. This blending does not diminish research integrity. In fact, blending allows researchers to see themselves and their own knowledge in completely different ways and consequently catalyses, multiples or amplifies the ways in which knowledge can be used and made sense of.

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You can read the Editorial in *Evidence & Policy*:

Langley, J. Kayes, N. Gwilt, I. Snelgrove-Clarke, E. Smith, S. and Craig, C. (2022) Exploring the value and role of creative practices in research co-production (<https://doi.org/10.1332/174426421X16478821515272>). *Evidence & Policy*, DOI: [10.1332/174426421X16478821515272](https://doi.org/10.1332/174426421X16478821515272) (<https://doi.org/10.1332/174426421X16478821515272>).

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